

# King County Mattress Recycling Summit: Meeting Notes

ShoWare Center, Kent, Washington

December 7, 2011

## Summary:

52 participants from all ends of the mattress recycling supply chain attended the “Mattress Summit” hosted by King County LinkUp and the Take it Back Network, including three mattress recyclers ([MattressRecycling.ca](http://MattressRecycling.ca) of Vancouver, BC, [St. Vincent de Paul](http://St.Vincent.de.Paul) of Lane County, OR, and the WA Department of Corrections’ [Correctional Industries](http://Correctional.Industries)), six retail and manufacturing businesses, four nonprofit organizations, multiple solid waste and recycling businesses and consultants, as well as local and state government solid waste staff and one city councilmember.

The summit’s purpose was to share information with the entire mattress supply chain and foster discussion of ways to increase mattress recycling availability and convenience. Challenges, costs, and logistics were discussed and the knowledge and experience of the three mattress recyclers present was informative.

Mattresses are bulky, heavy and operationally difficult to dispose of. Mattresses can be manually disassembled in to their components (steel, foam, cotton, wood, and other fabrics) and sold for use in other markets. St. Vincent de Paul has been recycling mattresses in this manner for more than ten years in Eugene, OR and the San Francisco Bay Area.

King County presented the [Take it Back Network](http://Take.it.Back.Network) model of drop-off collection at business and nonprofit locations, from which mattresses would then be transported to recycling. The Take it Back Network has been successful at providing recycling convenience and availability for electronics and fluorescent lamps, before state law mandated recycling.

In the past year, the Product Stewardship Institute (in Boston) has been facilitating stakeholder discussion about [mattress stewardship legislation](http://mattress.stewardship.legislation); as a result of this, Connecticut is considering [mattress legislation in 2012](http://mattress.legislation.in.2012) (PDF); [Rhode Island](http://Rhode.Island) is also considering legislation. The City of Hartford, CT has a Case Study of curbside mattress (bulky item) collection costs and the [Connecticut DEP](http://Connecticut.DEP) has a survey of used mattress management, both part of their reasoning for pursuing mattress stewardship legislation.

British Columbia’s Metro Vancouver government [prohibited mattresses from disposal](http://prohibited.mattresses.from.disposal) on January 1, 2011: mattresses are defined as recyclable with exceptions for ones that are “unmarketable, whether due to decay or infestation or otherwise” (also see Metro’s [August 15 press release](http://August.15.press.release) (PDF)).

This summit was the first step in creating a dialog among everyone involved in the mattress recycling supply chain. We thank those who attended the summit and encourage everyone to visit the [King County LinkUp Mattress website](http://King.County.LinkUp.Mattress.website) to view the presentations and stay up-to-date on news and future developments.

## Discussion:

- Kevin O'Brien, St. Vincent de Paul of Lane County, OR: Landfill / disposal costs are expensive in the NW relative to other parts of the country. Yet mattress disposal is cheaper than recycling.
- Sam Taylor, USAgain: "It's our bottom line. We don't want those mattresses going into the landfill. If we could find a disposal or recycling service, even if it costs more, we would rather pay it and properly dispose. We want to be green but the costs kill us."
- Fabio Scaldaferri, of MattressRecycling.ca, asked why the U.S. is hesitant to legislate this issue and ban mattress disposal as Metro Vancouver has done with such success. "The ban was an incentive to get our act together. We had to learn fast and now it's a system that works. The ban increased recyclers [from one to three recyclers in the area]. This does need high volume—100,000 per year. But it's all about the drop off fee and coordination between markets."
- Tom Williamson, Correctional Industries: "We save 58,000 mattresses from going to the dump every year." The value of the separated recyclable components from one mattress piece is about \$3 (not including labor, and CI's labor rate is cheaper). One of our retail customers puts mattresses in bags before we pick up the trailer full of them.

### How do you recycle bed bug infested mattresses?

Kevin O'Brien, St. Vincent de Paul: Connecticut (Department of Environmental Protection) looked into bed bugs and recycling and they found that the processes which the end commodities (foam, cotton, cloth) go through to make it back to market will kill all creatures (with heat, chemicals). It's legal and safe. [See [CT DEP's report](#) on Best Practices of Bed Bug Management and Mattress Recycling.]

### How do you get mattresses to your location?

Tom Williamson, Correctional Industries: We drop off containers (trailers?) at a location and pick them up when we get a call that they are full.

Fabio Scaldaferri, MattressRecycling.ca: we do pick-up service and customers can also drop-off at our facility, or drop-off at City of Vancouver transfer station and landfill and other locations for a higher fee.

Kevin O'Brien, St. Vincent de Paul: we contract with public agencies and haulers to collect mattresses at transfer stations and to deliver trailers of mattresses to our recycling facility.

### Are wet mattresses an issue that cannot be overcome?

Fabio Scaldaferri, MattressRecycling.ca: We recycle wet mattresses everyday. The only thing affected is the cotton. The degree of wetness and any mildew damage determines if it can be recycled.

Kevin O'Brien, St. Vincent de Paul: We sometimes let slightly wet mattresses dry in our warehouse before recycling them. About 10% or less of mattresses are not recyclable (are disposed of).

## Why would anyone start a recycling business if state prison labor can always undercut them?

Sam Taylor, USAgain: Private business can win out. They just have to do it better and more efficiently. It's all about the government creating a campaign to recycle, education, because it's the right thing to do—not just implementing a ban.

NOTE: Correctional Industries is a [Class II Industry](#) which has restrictions on competing with Washington businesses; at this time there are no mattress recycling businesses in Washington.

- One of the key issues is accessibility. Recycling is needed whenever people decide to buy a new mattress, whether through a retailer or Craigslist. Sometimes people don't have the ability to haul away their old mattress. Mattress recycling needs to be more accessible, more convenient and affordable. *Tends to be a bigger issue with lower income households.*

Robert Young, Sleep Country USA, reiterated the point: "if they can't get it to a recycler, they will look to dump it."

- Solid waste and recycling hauling businesses would like to have transfer stations, or other locations, as drop-off sites.

Tom Williamson, Correctional Industries: solid waste public agencies have not shown an interest in providing collection locations.

Robert Young, Sleep Country USA: Recycling mattresses is expensive, too. Until there is a higher mattress disposal fee at transfer stations, mattresses will continue to be taken there instead of recycling.

Jeff Gaisford, King County Solid Waste Division, Recycling and Environmental Services Manager: King County's transfer stations don't have the space to collect mattresses; we are maxed-out.

Kevin O'Brien, St. Vincent de Paul: It is important that solid waste agencies coordinate amongst themselves: mattresses will go where it is cheapest.

Lisa Sepanski, King County Solid Waste Division: provided a history of the Take it Back Network: the Take it Back Network began as an electronics recycling pilot program, more than 10 years ago before there were any laws requiring electronics recycling [as we have now with the manufacturer-run [E-Cycle Washington](#) program]. The Network is a voluntary recycling partnership between retailers, recyclers, local governments, and nonprofits: currently there are Take it Back Networks for electronics and fluorescent lamps.

- Steve Young, Seattle Mattress Company: I don't think my customers would have a problem paying a small fee, 90% of my customers want their mattress to be recycled or to be reused by someone who needs it; customers are asking about where mattresses go, so they are interested.
- Tiffany Hatch, Goodwill Seattle: Goodwill no longer accepts used mattresses for donation because of the difficulty in handling them, the possibility of bed bugs, and the expense in disposing of them. Goodwill is unable to charge a fee for recycling / collection [Goodwill was part of the original Take it Back Network for electronics recycling, but their rules prevent them from charging a recycling fee].

- Shannon McClelland, Department of Ecology: Pilot for mattresses is needed (like electronics recycling had). And information on life cycle costs is important.
- Shirli Axelrod, Seattle Public Utilities: We need to make distinctions between the business generators and ones that come from individual households. Whether donation bins can be set up or a different business model, there is some volume that can be addressed in certain ways. The ones-ies and twos-ies need a different market to work out. This kind of operation requires a large scale of mattresses. The replacement of hotels/motels doesn't happen as often as you think or would like, it's a big investment on their part.
- Scott Oster, Parklane Mattresses: It costs us \$28.40 per mattress to recycle. The biggest hurdle is getting that cost covered. We want to get those mattresses out of the market for ecological reasons and for sanitary reasons. Until all of these things are addressed, it won't work out: collection, pick up, transportation and storage. A lot of it is capacity, extracting mattresses isn't the problem—need those infrastructures; that end process.
- Mattress recycling creates *green jobs*. Fabio Scaldaferri of MattressRecycling.ca: created more than 100 jobs (direct and tangential) in the last 2 years in Metro Vancouver.